

THE CONCEPT OF DISCOURSE: LINGUISTIC, PRAGMATIC, AND SEMIOTIC APPROACHES

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Abstract

This article examines theoretical interpretations of the concept of discourse within linguistic, pragmatic, and semiotic approaches. The relationship of discourse with text, speech, communicative situations, and extralinguistic factors is analyzed through the perspectives of various linguists. The study also explores the role of discourse in the anthropocentric paradigm, pragmalinguistics, and cognitive linguistics, highlighting its national-cultural and social characteristics. Furthermore, attention is given to the significance of discourse in communicative activity and to current issues in discourse analysis within contemporary linguistics.

Keywords: Discourse, pragmalinguistics, communicative process.

Introduction

Today, all branches of modern linguistics differ from one another in terms of their objects of study, research methods, and methodological foundations, while simultaneously complementing and requiring one another. In the process of communication, the national identity, worldview, and cultural heritage of peoples are manifested through linguistic units. As a result, a collective national worldview is formed within the memory of a speech community.

According to Leo Weisgerber, a national worldview is shaped in accordance with the destiny of a linguistic community, its geographical location, historical development, spiritual life, and external conditions. Even if two nations share similar historical and social circumstances, it is unlikely that they will possess identical linguistic worldviews embedded in their respective languages. There is nothing more closely connected to a people than its language; indeed, language not only reflects but also helps shape national identity. Language serves as the memory of a nation, preserving previous experiences while simultaneously providing the foundation for future activities and intellectual development.

Since the late twentieth century, the formation of the anthropocentric paradigm in linguistics has created favorable conditions for the emergence of several new linguistic disciplines, including pragmalinguistics, linguoculturology, and linguopoetics. Pragmalinguistics investigates issues related to the functioning of language in real communicative situations; in other words, pragmatics concerns the meaning expressed within a particular context.

Charles W. Morris, who extensively studied issues related to semiotics, distinguished three major branches within the theory of signs: syntax, which studies relations among signs; semantics, which examines relations between signs and the objects they denote; and pragmatics, which investigates relations between signs and their users or interpreters. While pragmatics has developed into an independent field of linguistic inquiry, discourse theory has become one of



the central issues explored within its framework.

The French term *discours* (derived from the Latin *discursus*, meaning “movement,” “conversation,” or “communication”) is translated into English as *discourse*. Less frequently, it may also refer to speech, a type of speech, text, or a type of text. *Discourse* is considered one of the most complex concepts to define precisely. Nevertheless, it remains one of the most frequently used and functionally convenient terms in modern linguistic studies. Initially, in French linguistics, the term *discours* was used to denote speech or text in general.

Literature Review

The present study employs comparative-descriptive, pragmalinguistic, and discourse-analytical methods. Theoretical views proposed by various linguists are examined and compared.

Émile Benveniste explains the essence of *discours* as the distance between the stage of speech production and the process of its interpretation by the listener. In contemporary cognitive linguistics and pragmalinguistics, *discours* has become one of the central concepts attracting considerable scholarly attention.

Various scholars have offered different definitions of *discours*. Some modern linguists define *discours* as a collection of interconnected texts. The terms *discours* and *discours analysis* were first introduced by Zellig Harris as a method for analyzing connected speech and writing.

Discours has also been defined as:

- the written or spoken verbal product of communicative activity;
- a complex communicative phenomenon that includes not only the text itself but also extralinguistic factors influencing its production and interpretation;
- a communicative situation involving the consciousness of communicants and the text generated in the process of communication;
- a text immersed in a communicative situation.

These definitions demonstrate that *discours* cannot be reduced to a single dimension. Most definitions emphasize only one particular aspect of the phenomenon. In reality, *discours* is a multifaceted and complex process whose object, content, and structure extend far beyond the boundaries of language itself and encompass a wide range of communicative, cognitive, and social factors.

Analysis and Results

As can be seen from the definitions discussed above, *discours* is a linguistic phenomenon closely related to text. Therefore, within a pragmalinguistic approach, the relationship between *discours* and text, communicative processes, and national-cultural aspects becomes an important area of investigation.

In some studies, the term *discours* is used interchangeably with text. However, *discours analysis* extends beyond the examination of formal linguistic features. It also considers why language is used in specific social and cultural contexts. Consequently, *discours analysis* examines the relationship between language—whether written or spoken—and the contexts in which it is employed. One of the defining characteristics of *discours* is the coherence and continuity perceived within the text.

According to A. Pardaev, *discours* is the process in which speakers and listeners employ



linguistic and non-linguistic means in the forms they consider most effective for exchanging ideas and influencing one another.

In the early 1960s, the anthropologist Dell Hymes became one of the first scholars to emphasize the significance of discourse. In his view, discourse is the process of verbal interaction among people. Furthermore, discourse is not merely communication itself but a phenomenon that emerges through the interaction between communication and text.

Within the framework of Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism, speech (parole) was not considered an independent object of study. Instead, it was regarded as a derivative of language (langue). As linguistic perspectives evolved, however, a new object of inquiry emerged at the intersection of language and speech. This object came to be known as discourse.

Consequently, discourse began to be examined in relation to Saussure's third concept, langage, commonly translated as "speech activity" or "language activity." This approach was influenced by Erik Buysens' introduction of discourse as a scientific concept and by Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of the "language game." In both cases, discourse is viewed not simply as text but as a phenomenon directly related to language use. A theoretical basis for this interpretation can also be found in Yuri Lotman's concepts of the semiosphere and semiotic boundaries.

T. M. Nikolaeva considers discourse one of the key concepts in text linguistics and identifies several meanings frequently associated with the term:

1. Dialogue;
2. The spoken form of a text;
3. A group of semantically connected sentences;
4. A coherent text;
5. A spoken or written speech product.

Over time, the concept of discourse expanded beyond the boundaries of text linguistics and came to include the conditions under which a text is produced and interpreted.

Discourse may therefore be understood as the outcome of language users' communicative activity. In this process, elements of the language system interact with textual and speech forms. These interactions are shaped by complex relations among language, speech, text, reality, and social practice.

S. T. Zolyan summarizes these perspectives by defining discourse as "a text viewed in the context of its actualization," "language in real time," "speech embedded in life," or "the human being manifested through language."

Thus, discourse reflects the culture, mentality, and worldview of a particular nation. It embodies both universal and culture-specific features that emerge from collective patterns of thinking.

Teun A. van Dijk, one of the most influential scholars in discourse studies, distinguishes several meanings of discourse:

- In a broad sense, discourse is a complex communicative phenomenon that may include written, oral, and non-verbal components;
- In a narrow sense, discourse is the written or spoken product of a communicative act;
- As a specific conversation, discourse is always connected with a particular context and communicative environment;
- As a type of communicative activity, discourse is associated with particular forms of language production;



- As a genre, discourse may include political discourse, scientific discourse, media discourse, and other varieties;
- As a cultural phenomenon, discourse may represent a specific historical period, social community, or entire culture.

Therefore, discourse serves as an important foundation for numerous linguistic studies. It reflects the cultural, historical, social, and ethnic characteristics of a speech community and enables researchers to explore the linguistic manifestations of national ways of thinking.

The development of pragmatic and cultural approaches to language has reinforced the anthropocentric orientation of modern linguistics. This perspective emphasizes the human factor in language use and regards communication as a dynamic process involving cognition, culture, and social interaction.

The meanings expressed through discourse are diverse and multifaceted. In addition to speech activity, discourse reveals the speaker's inner experiences, psychological state, and personal characteristics. For example, monologic discourse represents speech produced by a single individual, while other discourse types may involve interaction among multiple participants.

The social nature of language and its role as the primary means of communication have long been recognized by linguists. Nevertheless, until the 1970s, many situational, psychological, and sociocultural aspects of communication remained outside the focus of linguistic research. Scholars concentrated mainly on purely linguistic units rather than on communication as a holistic process.

As E. S. Kubryakova notes, discourse is now regarded as an integral component of cognitive pragmatics. It represents speech activity through which communicative intentions are expressed and influence is exerted on other participants in communication.

Discourse analysis emerged in the 1970s and 1980s through interdisciplinary research in linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. During this period, scholars such as Dell Hymes, J. L. Austin, J. R. Searle, and H. P. Grice investigated language as a social reality and explored the mechanisms of communication and speech acts.

The primary objective of discourse analysis is the study of language in use. It seeks not only to describe linguistic forms but also to explain the purposes and functions these forms serve in human activity.

M. A. K. Halliday's work contributed significantly to this field by emphasizing the social functions of language and the analysis of both spoken and written discourse. Research expanded to include educational discourse, medical discourse, service encounters, interviews, debates, business communication, and monologic speech.

Similarly, the Prague Linguistic School played an important role in demonstrating the relationship between grammar and discourse. In the United States, discourse analysis developed within ethnomethodological traditions, focusing on naturally occurring interactions such as storytelling, greetings, and culturally specific communicative behaviors.

According to M. Stubbs, discourse possesses three fundamental characteristics:

1. It is a linguistic unit larger than a sentence;
2. It is associated with language use in social contexts;
3. It is interactive and dialogic in nature.

These characteristics illustrate the broad scope of discourse and its significance as a subject of contemporary linguistic research.



Conclusion

The review of various theoretical approaches demonstrates that discourse is a multifaceted and interdisciplinary concept. Linguistic, pragmatic, cognitive, and semiotic perspectives all contribute to a deeper understanding of its nature.

Among the numerous definitions proposed by scholars, the interpretation offered by N. D. Arutyunova remains one of the most widely accepted. According to her, discourse is a text considered together with extralinguistic factors such as pragmatic, sociocultural, psychological, and cognitive conditions. It is a form of speech viewed as a purposeful social action and as an integral component of human interaction and cognition.

Discourse analysis has significantly expanded the scope of linguistic research by revealing the communicative potential of syntactic structures and by highlighting the role of the individual in communication. Through discourse analysis, it becomes possible to investigate how people express ideas, construct meanings, and reflect cultural values in specific communicative situations.

Furthermore, discourse serves as a bridge between language, society, culture, and cognition. It reflects the social environment in which communication occurs and provides valuable insights into the national and cultural identity of a speech community.

Therefore, discourse should be regarded not merely as a linguistic phenomenon but as a complex communicative, cognitive, and sociocultural process. Its study remains one of the most important and promising directions in contemporary linguistics.

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